Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Are the Media Biased?**

DIRECTIONS: Read and annotate the article and then answer the questions below.

Many Americans believe that the media have a liberal (democrat) or conservative (republican) bias. Nevertheless, most professional journalists strive to be fair and unbiased in their reporting. In its code of ethics, the Society of Professional Journalists calls on its members to be “honest, fair, and courageous.” It cautions that “deliberate distortion [of the facts] is never [allowed].”

What critics see as media bias may, in reality, be a reflection of how news organizations work. Most news media outlets are businesses. They need to attract readers, listeners, or viewers to survive. With limited space or time to fill, their reporters, editors, and producers have to make choices about what stories to cover. These decisions are less likely to be motivated by political ideology than by what they think will attract and hold an audience.

Journalists look at many factors in choosing what stories to cover. One is impact. Will the story touch people in some way, even if only to make them mad or sad? A second is conflict, preferably mixed with violence. Does the story involve a crime, a fight, a scandal, or a disaster? A third factor is novelty. Is the story about a “hot topic” or a breaking news event? A fourth is familiarity. Does the story involve people we all know and find interesting?

These factors influence what you see and hear as news. Because reporters like novelty, you won’t see many stories about ongoing issues or social problems. Because they want conflict, you won’t see much coverage of compromise in the making of public policy. And because they are looking for impact, bad news almost always wins out over good. As an old saying in journalism goes, “If it bleeds, it leads.”

Questions